

John Porter House
Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5397

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
25-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN PORTER HOUSE

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Location: The John Porter house is located approximately 90' west of the southwest corner of Bridge and Main streets, on the south side of Main Street, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: R. Alan Isenberg.

Present Use: Single-family dwelling.

Significance: This is a good example of a gable-and-wing plan vernacular dwelling, with Federal styling largely confined to doorway detailing. Constructed on the cusp of the canal era, the house remains little-altered today.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1822-24.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The house is located on lot No. 14 in the original layout of Alexandria; its property includes the area of lot No. 15 adjacent to No. 14 up to the brick dwelling on the corner, then south 200' to the Juniata River.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1824 Deed April 30, 1824, recorded in Volume W1, Page 523.
Conrad Bucher
TO
John and Maria Porter.

1897 Deed December 13, 1897, recorded in Volume N4, Page 353.
J.M. Porter and C.H. Porter (executors for John Porter)
TO
Salome Porter.

1932-73 Various owners occupied the building as a dwelling.

1973 Deed April 23, 1973, recorded in Volume 110, Page 512.

Carl R. and Elvira Bruno
TO
R. Alan and Helen Isenberg.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The five-bay, L-plan brick building features a center-hall interior arrangement. The front rooms were generally used as parlor/living room and dining room. The kitchen was behind the dining room in the wing. In two-story residences such as this, the upstairs generally contained bedrooms. There is a brick cellar floor and fireplace.

4. Alterations and additions: A single-story, shed-roofed frame addition--covered with aluminum siding--is located in the space created by the rear ell, in the southwest corner of the south rear wall.

An aluminum-sided porch extends along the south wall, approximately 30' x 10'. The door into the porch is located in the northeast corner of the east wall; a one-over-one-light aluminum window is directly opposite. On the south wall of the porch there are three small one-over-one-light aluminum windows.

- B. Historical Context: A number of similar brick houses from this period are extant in Alexandria--four or five of them on Main Street. This structure exemplifies their modest Federal character.

The owner of this house throughout the canal era, John Porter, was a locally eminent man. He was director of the Alexandria school in 1848, and secretary of the school board from 1857-64. An elder of the Presbyterian Church in its early years, he was also clerk of the Presbyterian sessions for fifty-six years (Africa, 430). One of the most successful of Alexandria's merchants, Porter also served as postmaster in 1830 (Africa, 427). This house also was the birthplace of his son, Thomas Conrad Porter, a moderately well-known botanist whose accomplishments led to a tree and a flower being named after him (Huntingdon County Historical Society).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Front-facing, two-story L-plan reflects a typical five-bay arrangement with Federal styling.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

- B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main block is an estimated 50' x 40'; the rear south-projecting ell is approximately 20' long.
2. Foundation: Stone.

3. Wall construction: Brick, laid in Flemish bond on the main facade; five-course common bond on the south, east and west walls.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: A modest Victorian hipped-roof porch covers the entrance; it is supported by a pair of double turnposts on the northern corners and single attached posts at the facade. The railing, too, is simple wood.
6. Chimneys: The gable ends are distinguished by double interior brick chimneys. On the east end there are three narrow, vertical windows at the attic level, situated between the two flues. A third less-formal chimney that probably vents the kitchen stove protrudes from the intersection of the main block and rear ell.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a single, six-paneled wood door surrounded by a decorated fanlight and flanking three-light sidelights.
 - b. Windows: The wood windows on the five-bay facade are six-over-six-light double-hung sash with a thin, projecting wood sill. Three small vertical windows represent the sole openings on the east gable-end wall: a modest Palladian composition of an arched four-light window flanked by two rectangular three-light windows. The exposed gable-end of the ell features a four-light window in the uppermost corner. The west wall of the main mass is blank. The west facade of the ell has two windows on each floor; the south wall has a small, four-light square window; the east wall features a four-over-four-light window on the second story.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The side-gabled roof has a parapet, from which rise double interior brick chimneys. It is covered with asbestos shingles set in a diamond pattern.
 - b. Cornice: Simple wood boxed cornice.
- C. Description of Interior: The interior has been unsympathetically remodeled (Huntingdon County Historic Sites Survey).
- D. Site:
 1. General setting: The John Porter House is located on Main Street near the intersection with Bridge Street, historically a major entry into Alexandria from the south. Behind the lot flows the Juniata River. Residences line the street

on either side of this structure, as well as across the street, although originally the building to the west of the house served as a store.

2. Landscaping, enclosures: A gravel driveway aligns the east flank of the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views (found in Hartslog Henitage, 65).

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-02-67.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Henitage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).